



Intersessional Work Programme
Standing Committee Meetings June 21 – 25, 2004

Closing Remarks by Ambassador Martin Dahinden

Mr. President,
Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends

Every time I have had the chance to be on this podium I have carefully refrained from making statements of a political nature or regarding the content of the proceedings. It goes without saying that the temptation to do otherwise was always very strong and very difficult to resist.

Now on this final occasion I will not waiver and therefore I looked through my collection of quotations and memorable sentences around which to build a statement.

My attention fell quite quickly to on one of my favourites stemming from the protagonist in Graham Greene's spy novel, *Our Man in Havana*, who stated: *Never learn from experience.*

Never learning from experience sounds like a paradox. But looking at international affairs you can learn quickly that ex-

perience is very often a burden rather than an asset. Too often reference to experience is used as a vehicle to avoid change or to prevent imagination.

The mine ban movement in the 1990's was considered by many to be unrealistic. Experience since the 1869 St. Petersburg Declaration seemed to teach that not much progress could ever be expected.

Because experience has been rejected, it was possible to do the right thing instead of remaining with the realistic one.

The environment for mine action has changed and will continue to change. Past success has never guaranteed future success.

When planning action for the time after Nairobi, it is important to be ambitious, to reject realism without imagination, and to avoid the trap of routine which very often follows the voice of experience.

I wish you courage, imagination and continued strong commitment.

George Bernard Shaw, in a statement without proper gender balance, stated: *The reasonable man adapts himself to the world. The unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the*

world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man.

Before closing my notebook with the collected quotations, suddenly a sentence jumped out at me as if it has been written just for me a long time ago. It was a sentence from J.R.R.Tolkien, author of the Lord of the Rings: *Faithless is he that says farewell when the road darkens.*

For a moment I thought it called upon my bad conscience when leaving now my job in Geneva. But immediately I was reconfirmed: the road does not darken, Nairobi lies ahead and the fellowship of mine action will remain strong. I can faithfully say farewell.

I would like to thank you for the cooperation and personal relations, and also for the many good words you addressed to the Centre. It is my colleagues, the staff members of the Geneva Centre, that deserve them most.

Thank you.